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JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY: THE PERIOD OF POPULARITY¹

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One's view of the synoptic problem must play a large part in determining his historical judgments in the life of Jesus. A theory of literary relationships gives the student a starting-point for his historical reconstruction of that life. The now practically assured result of many arduous years of literary criticism, that Matthew used Mark's Gospel in Greek, is itself big with consequences. Zahn differs from most modern scholars, in that he holds that Mark used Matthew's Gospel, but in this conclusion he now stands practically alone.

The comparison of Matthew with Mark and with Luke,² from this point of view, enables us historically to estimate Matthew's account of the Galilean ministry of Jesus in the period of popularity. We observe that Matthew has in general followed Mark's order, but that he has often preferred a topical arrangement to that which was in his source, and some deviations which are at first sight quite confusing, upon closer inspection become more intelligible. It is evident that in considerable portions Matthew has but re-edited the Gospel of Mark. Aside from the short accounts of three miracles given in 9:27-33 and 12:22, which offer peculiar difficulties, Matthew has added to Mark's account but one miracle, the healing of the centurion's servant, recorded also by Luke. Changes both in order and in fact appear to be mainly for literary and theological reasons. Such appear to be the duplications in the case of the demoniacs and of the blind men. Unless it be in some minor instances, as the substitution of Matthew for Levi in the list of the apostles, the

¹ This study covers the International Uniform Sunday-School Lessons for April 3, 10, 17, 24, and May 1.

² Allen, *International Critical Commentary* (on St. Matthew), has worked all this out with great detail.

writer of the First Gospel does not correct Mark's narrative from more authentic sources, so far as we can judge.

In one instance, however, Matthew may be historically right in his rearrangement of Markan material. We have seen that Mark begins to introduce the hostility of the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus as early as the second chapter, but that Matthew defers this feature. While Mark as compared with Matthew is chronological rather than topical, yet in Mark also there is evidence of topical grouping. It is likely that at first Jesus did not attract great attention from the scribes and Pharisees and they did not therefore seriously interfere with his work. Upon just such points as this the historian must pass judgment.

But it is also evident that Matthew frequently draws upon sources other than Mark. We cannot be sure that the discourses introduced by Matthew were spoken on the occasions specified. Luke often gives them in a different connection. In some instances Matthew appears to have built up longer discourses around brief ones given in Mark; such, for example, is the charge to the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13; Matt. 10:5-42). The appearance of many of these sayings in Luke suggests that Matthew compiled detached sayings into larger discourses, though it is possible that these discourses were in his sources: The presence of a passage also in Luke, its apparent originality, and its seeming freedom from later influences, often assure us of its antiquity and of its authenticity as a saying of Jesus. But beyond a certain point it is in some instances impossible to press. For example, in Matt. 11:27 there is a remarkable antithesis: the Son, the Father. It is found only here in this Gospel. Its occurrence in Luke carries it back to an earlier stage in the gospel tradition. The same usage occurs in Mark 13:32. When the historian attempts to push back farther, he finds the way uncertain.³

The cause of Jesus' popularity in Galilee is not difficult to discover. Matthew has suggested a helpful contrast between the content of his preaching in the earlier period and later. The early Galilean ministry was to the common people. It is introduced by Matthew in these words: "From that time began Jesus to preach and to say: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17). But later both the

³ See article by E. F. Scott, pp. 186-90.

content of his preaching and his auditors changed, as is indicated in the following: "From that time began Jesus to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised on the third day" (16:21). In reporting that Jesus began his ministry by the preaching of the kingdom Matthew is following Mark. He characteristically abbreviates Mark's fuller statement. According to Mark the message of Jesus was this: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the good news" (1:15).

To one acquainted with the Jewish literature of that day the meaning of these terms is unmistakable. It is the familiar language of apocalyptic. The proclamation was a startling one and constituted the man making it a revolutionist. It allied him with the radical elements and tendencies of the day. The time is fulfilled. A new epoch in history is about to be inaugurated. The end of the present age has come and the new age is about to begin. Behold, God is coming to his people, and this means vengeance for the wicked, sifting for Israel, and deliverance for the righteous. "The fulness of the time!" (Gal. 4:4). God has allotted out the ages; the measure of the present age is now full, and the messianic age is about to begin. The man who made this proclamation was in line with the older prophets, who announced the near advent of the day of Yahweh—a dreadful day of revolution, physical convulsion and upheaval, of judgment upon the sinful many and deliverance for the righteous few. Surely repentance was advisable in view of the approach of the messianic period.

We may bring ourselves to a faint realization of what such a proclamation must have meant by supposing that in some community untouched by the modern view of the world a preacher today should boldly and confidently announce that in view of the rumors of wars that now disturb the international situation, in view of the terrible earthquakes at San Francisco and Messina, and more especially in view of Halley's comet now appearing, the end of the world is at hand. On the social side a better analogy is the social revolution of modern radicals. A fundamental difference is that with the older prophets, to a less but considerable extent with the apocalypticists, with John the Baptist, with Jesus, and with his immediate followers, the interest

and emphasis were more on moral conditions and results than on economic prosperity. Another difference is that with them the kingdom was to come not by social evolution or revolution but by the direct intervention of God.

Just what the kingdom meant depended upon the persons who thought of it. Many and diverse hopes and fears clustered about these messianic terms. It seems that the masses of the people were intent upon the expulsion of the Roman power and consequent freedom from despotism and tax extortion. The legalist desired "righteousness," or perfect obedience to the law. In general we may say that the coming of the kingdom involved the restoration of Israel to national independence and power as under David, social prosperity and justice, an end to the suffering of the righteous, knowledge of God and the doing of his will. Spiritual people naturally dwelt more upon the spiritual blessings.

And Jesus had his own conception of the kingdom. Scholars are not agreed as to what that was, but certain features stand out markedly in the period we are studying. We know that he rejected the political feature of the popular hope. He refused to lend his influence to the party of the Zealots. From all symbols of hatred he turned away: the sword, violence, bloodshed. For him love was the power that held society together, and love must save it. By teaching the truth and by self-sacrifice, in trust and dependence on the Father, he would win the victory, or not at all. And yet we need not overlook the fact that he was crucified partly because the Sadducees and Pilate thought that they discerned in him danger of political disturbance. He is reported to have called Herod, his ruler, "that fox" (Luke 13:32).

In the second place, Jesus' conception of the kingdom is in marked contrast with that of John the Baptist. Matthew has taken this message ascribed to Jesus in Mark 1:15 and attributed it to the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2), where Mark has: "Preaching a baptism of repentance unto forgiveness of sins" (1:4). But Matthew has with good reason made an important omission: it is the feature of the Lord's preaching which constituted it good news, and which was wanting in the message of the Baptist. According to Matthew's account John warned the people of the coming wrath, the flames of judgment, called the professional religionists

who came to him an offspring of vipers, told the people that only repentance could save them in the coming judgment, that the Messiah was already at hand, would lay the axe at the root of the tree and with his fan thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into the garner but winnowing out the chaff to burn it with unquenchable fire. John came to his martyrdom because, according to our gospels, he denounced the immorality of his ruler, Herod Antipas, or, according to Josephus, because Herod feared a revolutionary rising on account of John's influence over the people. Now Jesus was called forth from the seclusion of Nazareth by the Baptist's movement, and he cordially placed himself in line with it. He championed the cause of John the Baptist and paid him a high tribute. But that did not blind him to the difference between his own message and mission and the work of John. When from the castle of Machaerus, where John was given liberty of communication with his disciples, he sent to Jesus for an explanation of the divergence between his own and the popular messianic expectation on the one hand, and on the other the character of Jesus' work, our Lord appreciated the strain that was being put upon both the faith of John and that of his own disciples. The difference between himself and John extended even to their personal habits and manner of life, as Jesus publicly recognized: John was an ascetic, while Jesus was affable, genial, and sociable.

In the third place, the kingdom was for Jesus human and universal instead of national. We do not forget that our gospels arose on the Gentile field, when the church was conscious of her missionary responsibilities, and accordingly we shall be on our guard against ascribing to Jesus all of the marks of the larger outlook. His mission was to his own people. But the kernel of his message and work is universal. His teaching concerning God the heavenly Father, concerning man and sin, concerning heart-purity and love and service, parables like those of the Prodigal Son and of the Good Samaritan, are universal in scope. On strictly critical grounds we refrain from ascribing to Jesus certain sayings looking in another direction, recorded in Matthew's Gospel. And finally, while it seems best to regard the kingdom as essentially future, in the thought of Jesus, it would appear, the beginnings were already present (Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21).

Mark 1:15 probably gives a general summary of Jesus' message instead of the specific terms in which it was delivered, but it is certain that his message revolved more or less about the kingdom of God. We have seen how the news that the kingdom was at hand must have powerfully stirred the emotions and imaginations of the people. What it meant to the common people is suggested by the beautiful messianic hymns found in the first and second chapters of Luke.

He showed strength with his arm;
He scattered the proud in the thought of their heart;
He put down princes from thrones and exalted the lowly;
The hungry he filled with good things,
And the rich he sent away empty (Luke 1:51-53).

The words of Jesus fell as sweet music upon the ears of the people. It was as though the psalmist had again taken up his harp.

Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you that hunger now, For you shall be filled.
Blessed are you that weep now, For you shall laugh (Luke 6:20, 21).

These terms, with both their economic and religious significance, breathe the very atmosphere of the Psalms; we are carried back to the time when the poor and needy were oppressed by the rich and powerful, and when accordingly the poor people were identified in thought with the pious of the land. Downtrodden by the haughty and ungodly, they felt the need of God's help and were the special objects of his favor. While Luke has probably preserved the form of our Lord's words, Matthew has more accurately represented the Semitic idiom.

Despised by the Pharisees, the unlearned common people rejoiced to hear that so great blessings were theirs, that technical learning was not essential, but open-mindedness and childlikeness were. The blessings of the kingdom were for the gentle and teachable, and not for the violent, dogmatic, self-asserting people. Hence the rigid, orthodox Jews failed to appreciate and bitterly resented his teaching, and Mark's suggestion that very early he attracted their suspicion and enmity is not altogether unlikely. That he made upon his disciples stern ethical demands would not at first militate against his popularity with the masses; in its first stages the people like that sort of thing, and worship a brave man and a hero. In him they saw with admiring

delight one whose inward sense of dignity and authority made him superior to their scribes and to ancient prophet and lawgiver.

But it was not only the music of the Psalms that was heard; there were also heard those majestic strains that sound and resound through the second portion of the Book of Isaiah, so grandly interpreted in modern times by Handel:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem,
And cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished,
That her iniquity is pardoned,
That she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all
her sins (Isa. 40:1, 2).

Jesus brought redemption to the people. That he wrought cures there can be no doubt. When the people were groaning beneath the heavy burdens laid upon them by their religious teachers, he summoned them to him for rest. He called them to a life of sincerity, ethical freedom, and trust in God. He set forth his own conception of his mission in the language of Isa. 61:1, 2, and replied to the question of the Baptist in the words of Isa. 35:5, 6. To the poor good news was preached, and it seemed to them that the acceptable year of the Lord had come.